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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 001880

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/29/2013

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SUBJECT: TFI201: JORDANIAN STATE-OWNED MEDIA'S PORTRAYAL OF THE WAR

REF: SECSTATE 81604

Classified By: A/DCM DOUG SILLIMAN FOR REASONS 1.5 (B), (D)

1. (C) SUMMARY. WE ASSESS JORDAN'S STATE-CONTROLLED MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE WAR IN IRAQ TO BE REACTIVE AND CAUTIOUS, RATHER THAN INCITEFUL. REFLECTING BROAD OPPOSITION AMONG JORDANIANS TO THE WAR AND ADMIRATION FOR IRAQI RESISTANCE, JORDAN'S STATE-OWNED MEDIA HAVE ADOPTED AN EDITORIAL LINE AGAINST OPERATION IRAQI LIBERATION, BUT HAVE SOUGHT TO AVOID INFLAMMATORY COVERAGE OR COMMENTARY THAT MIGHT STIR UP PASSIONS LOCALLY. THESE OUTLETS (JORDAN TELEVISION AND THE STATE-CONTROLLED ARABIC DAILY "AL-RAI") HAVE ALSO EMPHASIZED DOMESTIC ISSUES RELATED TO THE WAR, PROVIDING THE TRADITIONAL MOUTHPIECE FOR GOVERNMENT REACTION AND THE VIEWS OF THE KING AND HIS SENIOR LEADERSHIP. IN THIS REGARD, STATE-CONTROLLED MEDIA IS CARRYING OUT THE KING'S "JORDAN FIRST" PROGRAM: ACKNOWLEDGING AND SYMPATHIZING WITH STRONG VIEWS AGAINST THE WAR, BUT WORKING TO PRESERVE THE INTERESTS OF THE COUNTRY BY AVOIDING INCITEMENT THAT MAY LEAD TO INSTABILITY. END SUMMARY.

2. (C) TELEVISION: JORDAN TELEVISION RESPONDED TO THE BEGINNING OF THE IRAQ CONFLICT WITH AN EXPANDED NEWS FORMAT THAT INCLUDED IMPLEMENTING A PREVIOUSLY IN-TRAIN PLAN TO BROADCAST FROM NEW STUDIOS AND AN UPGRADED TECHNICAL PRESENTATION. HOWEVER, WITH NO CORRESPONDENTS IN THE WAR ZONE, OR EVEN IN THE GULF, JTV HAS RELIED ON FOOTAGE FROM OTHER SATELLITE NETWORKS, INCLUDING AL JAZEERA, AL ARABIYA, ABU DHABI, BBC AND CNN OVER WHICH IT RUNS ITS OWN NEWS COMMENTARY FROM THE STUDIO IN AMMAN. VIEWERSHIP REMAINS LOW AND THE PRODUCT UNSATISFACTORY TO MANY JORDANIANS WE CONSULT. VIEWERS HERE CONTINUE TO SEEK THEIR WAR NEWS FROM AL JAZEERA, AL MANAR, AL ARABIYA AND ABU DHABI TV. JTV'S EDITORIAL BIAS TENDS TOWARD SYMPATHY WITH THE "IRAQI RESISTANCE", THOUGH NOT IN A BRAZEN FORM. THE OPERATION IS REFERRED TO BY NEWS PRESENTERS AS "THE AMERICAN/BRITISH WAR ON IRAQ", WITH THE ADJECTIVE "BROTHERLY" SOMETIMES PRECEDING IRAQ ("IRAQ AL SHAKIK"). COVERAGE TENDS TO HIGHLIGHT CIVILIAN CASUALTIES AND REPORTS OF IRAQI RESISTANCE OR COALITION DIFFICULTIES WHILE DOWNPLAYING REPORTS OF FEDAYEEN INTIMIDATION OF IRAQI CIVILIANS OR OTHER ISSUES NEGATIVE TO THE IRAQI REGIME. THAT SAID, JTV HAS AVOIDED AIRING THE EXTENDED MONTAGES OF CIVILIAN INJURIES OR DEATHS FEATURED FREQUENTLY ON AL JAZEERA, A DECISION THAT APPEARS CALCULATED TO AVOID STIRRING PASSIONS. IN KEEPING WITH TRADITION, STATEMENTS OR ACTIVITIES OF THE KING, PRIME MINISTER OR OTHER SENIOR JORDANIAN GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS TRUMP WAR COVERAGE AT THE TOP OF EVENING NEWS BROADCASTS.

3. (C) OUTSIDE ITS NEWS SEGMENTS, JTV'S WAR COVERAGE RELIES HEAVILY ON IN-STUDIO TALK SEGMENTS THAT FEATURE KNOWN JORDANIAN PERSONALITIES, POLITICAL AND MILITARY ANALYSTS WHO ENGAGE IN EXTENSIVE -- AND MANY JORDANIANS SAY DRY -- ANALYSIS OF THE WAR. THIS IS WHERE JTV APPEARS MOST TO BE MINIMIZING INFLAMMATORY COVERAGE OF THE WAR. GUESTS ARE CHOSEN FROM AMONG KNOWN JORDANIANS WITH PREDICTABLE POSITIONS, WHICH HAS THE EFFECT OF ENFORCING A RELATIVELY ANODYNE DISCUSSION. THESE STUDIO GUESTS CAN BE COUNTED ON NOT TO INFLAME THE PUBLIC AND TO RESPECT THE CARDINAL RULE OF AVOIDING OUTRIGHT CRITICISM OF THE KING OR OF HIS GOVERNMENT IN THIS SENSITIVE TIME.

4. (C) PRINT MEDIA: LIKE ITS BROADCAST COUNTERPART, GOVERNMENT-CONTROLLED AL RAI ARABIC DAILY HAS GENERALLY ADOPTED A MORE CAUTIOUS TONE IN ITS WAR COVERAGE WHEN COMPARED TO JORDAN'S TWO OTHER ARABIC DAILIES (AL DUSTOOR AND AL ARAB AL YAWM) AND, LIKE JTV, HAS WORKED TO FEATURE THE VIEWS OF THE JORDANIAN GOVERNMENT PROMINENTLY IN ITS DAILY COVERAGE OF THE WAR. AL RAI FEATURES A CLEAR ANTI-WAR BIAS. IT HAS REFERRED TO IRAQI DEAD AS "MARTYRS" FROM THE INCEPTION OF THE CONFLICT AND HAS FEATURED ABOVE-THE-FOLD COLOR PHOTOGRAPHS OF DAMAGED CIVILIAN AREAS, AMERICAN POW'S, GLOBAL ANTI-WAR PROTESTS OR SMOKE RISING FROM BAGHDAD. SIDE-BY-SIDE, HOWEVER ARE STATEMENTS BY THE KING, PM OR OTHER SENIOR GOJ OFFICIALS EXPLAINING THE GOVERNMENT'S PRINCIPAL PUBLIC POSITIONS: JORDAN WILL NOT PARTICIPATE IN THE WAR, NOR WILL ITS TERRITORY BE USED BY THE U.S. FOR ATTACKS ON IRAQ; JORDAN IS WORKING TO FIND A PEACEFUL SOLUTION TO THE WAR; THE KING'S CONCERN FOR CIVILIAN VICTIMS OF THE WAR, ETC. IT HAS NOT FEATURED FRONT-PAGE PHOTOGRAPHS OF KILLED CIVILIANS OR GRIEVING FAMILY MEMBERS, HOWEVER, MIRRORING ITS GENERALLY SUBDUED COVERAGE OF THE SECOND INTIFADA. AL RAI'S DAILY EDITORIAL HAS, IN KEEPING WITH TRADITION, BEEN MILD IN COMPARISON WITH SIGNED OPINION ARTICLES OF JORDANIAN

POLITICAL ANALYSTS, AND HAS AS OFTEN AS NOT BEEN ABOUT THE GOVERNMENT'S OR THE KING'S PRESCRIPTIONS OR ADVICE FOR THE SOCIETY DURING THESE TURBULENT TIMES. EDITORIAL CARTOONS HAVE BEEN EXTREMELY TOUGH IN AL RAI (AS IN ALL OF JORDAN'S ARABIC DAILIES), WITH THE IMPOTENCE OR FAILURE OF ARAB REGIMES TO STOP THE WAR AND THE OVER-AGGRESSIVENESS OF THE UNITED STATES AS COMMON THEMES. AL RAI IS THE HOST FOR JORDAN'S LEADING COLUMNIST, FAHD AL-FANEK, WHO MIGHT BE DESCRIBED AS HARSHLY ANTI-AMERICAN AND PRO-IRAQI IN THE BEST OF TIMES. OVERALL, THOUGH, AL RAI APPEARS TO BE WORKING TO CONTAIN AND REFLECT RATHER THAN INFLAME LOCAL PASSIONS. GNEHM